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*Nobody ever defected  
because he was happy*

## PSYCHOLOGY OF TREASON

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The Agency definition of a defector is an individual who has committed treason, a person who first accepted identification with a regime and then betrayed his allegiance to cooperate with a hostile foreign intelligence service. Thus the word is used here differently than in the media.

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The emphasis here is on the hard core defector, the individual who has committed an act of treason.

Because I am a psychiatrist, this paper reflects a psychiatric bias. A sociologist, a political scientist, a historian would present a different view. But additionally my being a psychiatrist has certain clinical implications. I wish to allay any misconception implying that defectors are crazy, or that a person has to be crazy to become a defector. Quite to the contrary, the percentage of mental disorders of the psychotic type or of seriously neurotically impaired individuals among defectors is less than one would expect to find in an ordinary population of the same size. Psychotics and neurotics rarely enter the kinds of work that would make them attractive, as defectors, to the Agency. Though it might take different forms in other societies, a certain amount of screening goes on. Even without a psychiatrist or psychologist involved, there would be commanding officers and physicians or teachers weeding out individuals who were obviously mentally or emotionally unsuitable to receive information of a national security interest. When we find amongst our defector population people who do suffer from psychotic or neurotic difficulties, their disorders are usually of a very late and/or insidious onset. Even disorders such as alcoholism appear less frequently among defectors than among the population at large. Overall, severe clinical psychopathology is not usually a major factor among defectors.

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After we had interviewed many defectors we were asked to create a profile of a typical defector. I think the original requesters had something in mind akin to the profile of a skyjacker. This paper evolved out of the search for that profile. I begin by acknowledging defeat. We never found one single profile that would describe them all. After a dozen years of searching we were convinced that this was a futile task. If anything, what we did discover were parallel mutually exclusive pathways toward eventual acts of defection. So this is, in fact, a paper of generalizations, describing clusters of characteristics which fit most defectors.

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**Despair**

That said, I will begin with the one statement (aside from something as obvious as they all defected) which does describe all defectors: nobody ever defected because he was happy. While a defector might look happy at the moment, exhilarated at having executed a dramatic escape, or having pulled off a personal coup, or even after considerable contemplation having finally resolved his dilemma with a deliberate decision, the act was first put in motion by despair. Defection, at least on the part of people who are willing and/or driven to commit treason, is an act of strong feelings. Often it is an act of desperation. It is the act of a person who feels compelled to do it out of dissatisfaction, disillusionment, depression, and defeat. In our experience defection is a response to an acute overwhelming life crisis or to an accumulation of crises or disappointments; the individual finally feels forced to act. We use the word unhappy in the widest sense—someone unhappy because he was passed over for promotion, someone desperate because the auditors were arriving on Monday.

What are defectors unhappy about? This runs an enormous gamut of feelings and circumstances in life. Contrary to what you might believe, ideology would rank very low on the list of motivations. The reasons are much more likely to be personal, the stuff of soap operas, the ordinary unhappiness of everyday life. It is more likely to be intimate than ideological—marital problems, mistress problems, wrong sexual preference problems, drinking problems, gambling problems, money problems, career problems. Ideology seldom, certainly seldom alone, causes a defection. Almost never Leninism or communist ideology. The ideological exceptions in our experience were much more likely to be those of nationalism or of religion. But even those ideological defections seem to have been historically and geographically limited.

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Defection should not be viewed as a problem of communism, but as a human problem with security and political consequences. We have had serious defections from our side and the defectors who have gone from our side to the other were a mirror image of what I describe.

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The psychological underpinnings of defection transcend not only ideological but also cultural lines.

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I asked this defector about his family background. And he began a very excited response: "You know, I'm glad somebody asked me that. Because you know but for the character of my mother, I don't think I'd have been here."

Defections then are seen as reactions to the vicissitudes of life playing upon an already existing character structure. I have designed a rough equation to describe this:  $I \times C = D$ . "I" stands for the individual psychology, times "C" stands for the circumstances of life, equals "D" the act of defection. I have drawn this model to make a simple mathematical analogy. There are many combinations or variables by which you can arrive at 48. The extremes are 48 times 1 and 1 times 48. There is a relationship between the magnitude of the crisis or circumstances that precipitates a defection and the underlying character structure or life history of the individual who is being impinged upon. As you can imagine from this equation, the more overwhelming the crisis, the fewer distortions in the individual psychology and the life history required. If someone is making "progress" in his personal life he is seldom motivated to defect. Not only did defectors need an inclination or vulnerability to defect, many of them had to be moved by external circumstances.

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At the other extreme, we have seen people defect simply because they were miffed, passed over, disregarded, humiliated. They defected to seek vengeance, to strike back. Between these two extremes we see an enormous range of human possibilities. We have had people defect for such base reasons as attempting to avoid the legitimate pursuits of the ordinary justice of their own countries. One was an embezzler. The auditors were coming on Monday. He knew he had information of interest to American intelligence so he came rushing to make a deal. We have had people defect to us who imagined themselves to be under suspicion. They were frightened, perhaps feeling guilty, or suspicious of the intentions of their colleagues.

Many crises are related to age and circumstances. For example, a "Dear John" letter to a 21-year-old border guard could result in his defection because

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it comes when a young man is still forming his sense of identity and sexual acceptance. Not getting a promotion would probably have a less severe effect on him because many alternative career paths remained open. A 51-year-old executive might be much more overwhelmed by being passed over because of a lack of options at that time of his life.

Some defections are so deliberately dangerous as to risk life and limb. These are desperate attempts: escapes from immediate physical dangers, or flights from depression. Some defections have followed suicidal attempts. Others were hardly more than suicidal equivalents, the acts of individuals who had nothing more to live for and were desperately seeking a relief from the agony of despair as much as a wild hope for a second chance in a new life. Obviously the potential for redefection would be high in such individuals if their fantasized hopes could not be adequately realized in their new lives.

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Prominent in the psychology of many defectors is the mechanism of projection, the casting out of devils. The individual preserves his emotional virginity and deflects guilt, blame, and responsibility. Whatever the actual source of his difficulties, the defector perceives them as arising outside of himself rather than from within and so preserves his grandiose view of his immaculate self.

A British historian archly noted that a man is never so dangerous as when he can identify a private grievance with a matter of principle. Defection usually has a significant personal meaning in the context of patterns and expectations implicit in the earlier life history. Sometimes the act of defection seems to be a replaying of an earlier life crisis, especially in cases where there was in the life history a parental abandonment by separation, divorce, or death.

Few of us are actually as self-contained or independent as we imagine. The human condition is one of interdependency. Most of us have dependency needs without apologies, and inherent in most relationships are the reciprocal obligations implied on the part of both parties to meet the needs of the other. An

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unwritten social compact exists in all societies involving all the parties, individuals, and organizations. Many defections arise out of situations in which the individual feels that the regime reneged on its part of this implicit compact. The ties of reciprocal obligation are broken and often the individual will respond to this perceived betrayal with a treason of his own.

The defectors the Agency deals with usually are quite pragmatic, street-wise, cynical people who seldom really accepted the ideology of the system. They understood the corruption of the system the way a surf rider knows waves. They used the system to their individual advantage. Only when the system failed their pursuits, or when the system turned upon them did they suddenly become excited about the problems of communism. Scattered throughout the world must be many ordinary refugees who left for ideological reasons. But the kinds of people whom the Agency defines as defectors were not the downtrodden of the earth, because if they were they would have never obtained access to the kind of information that they traded or sold to us. Their defections may have been made psychologically easier for them simply because they were never committed to the official ideology. Even individuals who are not ideologists may express their personal discontent in political terms. This is especially likely to be the case if the person has been conditioned to explain himself this way or if he thinks picturing himself as politically motivated will convince a listener of his sincerity. Also ideological arguments tend to be high sounding and apt to be less embarrassing than a confession of base motives or humiliating personal indiscretions. One seldom chooses to play the fool.

**Loyalty**

I will now address the individual psychological factor in our equation and the factors underlying the development of an individual defector psychology. Since we are discussing treason we might stop and ask, "Where does loyalty come from anyway? Why is anybody ever loyal to anything?" There may be some genetic exceptions, but almost everyone is born with a capacity for loyalty. But this capacity has to be engaged and engendered in early life. Most of us learn about loyalty in the family. It has its origins in the mother-child relationship and in the natural process of growth and maturation. This sense of mutual warmth, obligation, response, and reciprocity expands to include the larger family, the neighborhood, friends, schoolmates, teammates, our colors, our flag, our country. We have to look at the special circumstances which might interfere with this normal development. Increasingly, studies are suggesting that there may be some individuals born with a diminished capacity for experiencing love, warmth, and hence loyalty.

There are individuals born in unusual geographical circumstances, such that there might be an attachment to mother and family but no sense of an attachment or affiliation to any larger field.

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The vagaries of geopolitical history are such that defectors may not feel loyalty to a nation but only to a tribe or an ethnic group or to a people. Frequently the nation in which they had been raised or the nation in whose service they found themselves may have played a role in the fracture of the original identity of that tribe or the turf of that tribe or ethnic group. The identification may be only cultural. [REDACTED] (b)(3)(n)

But even assuming that someone was born intact and that his geographical circumstances were tolerable, an individual still needs a home, a warm, receptive, understanding, and encouraging family. Many defectors were born into chaotic families divided or broken or shattered, often with its parts scattered, what is colloquially referred to as a broken home. The opportunity to form a sense of affiliation was absent in their childhood. They grew up without the proverbial ties that bind [REDACTED]

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The capacity for splitting and shifting loyalties, once incorporated into the personality of the developing child, remains present even if unconscious throughout life, a latent mechanism which can be quickly reactivated and drawn upon later.

So defectors often come from broken homes or distorted family backgrounds. But not always. This is a point at which there are parallel but mutually exclusive pathways toward defection. Obviously any defector is in opposition to his regime. But that doesn't mean that every defector is necessarily a rebel. Some defectors in their oppositional behavior are playing out in their adult lives the unresolved conflict of the adolescent striking back at his parents. Only now the regime has taken the place of the parent. An obvious instance of an immature individual striking back at a parent [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Not surprisingly the family history revealed that this young man hated his father. Obviously what we were seeing was the playing out of a family romance on the international stage. Such immature rebellious defectors often demonstrate an opposition and immaturity

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in many aspects of their adult behavior and so they are frequently difficult individuals to deal with under any circumstances.

But we also see defectors who are not rebels, individuals who are obviously identified with the values of their parents, products of warm, receptive, understanding, and encouraging families which were secretly dissident against the regime. The family history might have included some defeat at the hands of the regime with the defector now imagining himself the loyal avenger of the family. In his defection he is picking up the family's fallen banner of honor and shafting the regime with it. He is striking back not only in his own name, not just out of his own disappointment, but further emboldened, further strengthened by the emotional support he imagines from the family. He fantasizes that his parents would secretly applaud his actions. In some cases the support is even more obvious. Some potential defectors have confided their wistful, tentative intentions to their families and were immediately and wholeheartedly encouraged to act.

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So a defection can arise out of a warm and close family. Defectors who come from families with close ties are usually more mature and more stable individuals. They are usually (b)(1) likely to resettle more smoothly in their new lives. (b)(3)(n)

### **Traits**

In examining the individual factors I use words which in another context could be psychiatric diagnoses. While some defectors met such criteria, most did not. But I wish to emphasize that now I use these terms not as psychiatric diagnoses but as adjectives only because defectors often exhibit behaviors, traits, vulnerabilities, and proclivities which are best described by such words. Frequently it is a combination of these traits and proclivities which interact and culminate in the individual decision to defect.

We have observed a triad of three frequently recurring traits in defections. The first of these is immaturity or impulsivity. In particular these people exhibit a lack of tolerance for frustration and/or an inability to defer gratification. The conduct of such individuals is often emotion ridden. They display a consequent impairment in the regulation of their conduct. They act before they think or they over-react. Example: the young man who gets a "Dear John" letter and goes over the wall. Or the pilot who is the teacher's pet of the squadron commander. When the squadron commander is suddenly replaced by a severe disciplinarian the young man doesn't even wait for the change to sort out. He takes his plane over

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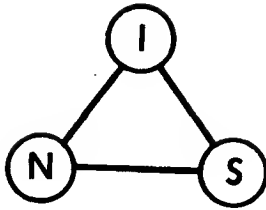
the border at the next turn. I would include in impulse disorders the individual who cannot control his gambling or his expenditures. Occasionally we will see a defector who is so grossly immature or so obviously disordered in terms of his impulse control that the clinical diagnosis is justified. More often we are dealing with an individual in whom we see only indicators.

The second trait of this triad is sociopathy. These individuals demonstrate problems with conscience or morals. They seldom hesitate to violate the rights of others to serve their own ends. A lay definition might be a chronic "son-of-a-bitch." There are two basic types of sociopaths. The less common variant would be the "hit and run" sociopath, the common criminal. Such people usually turn up in courts as defendants and they frequently wind up in jail. You read about them in the newspapers because they tend to do very exciting and dramatic things. The much more common variant is the "smile and suck" sociopath, the hustler and the confidence man, the con artist. They frequently turn up in court also, but are just as likely to be lawyers, judges, jurists; unfortunately they are sometimes psychiatrists, physicians, and case officers as well. Their depredations are in the long run probably more damaging than those of their "hit and run" colleagues but are usually less obviously dramatic. Often their acts are betrayals of a trust or a confidence. Although these people are an enormous problem, many of them never leave a discernable trail. Sociopaths are frequently referred to as people with "moth-eaten or swiss cheese" consciences. With some of these people what falls through the hole is a sense of loyalty to their country.

The third trait in this triad is narcissism. This is difficult to describe to a lay audience, especially in our society where self-reliance, initiative, confidence, self-assertiveness, and competitiveness are so emphasized as positive attributes. But narcissism is more than just self-love. It is a pathologic self-absorption, a preoccupation with the self at the expense of all else. Such individuals often possess a grandiose sense of their own importance. They exaggerate their accomplishments. They make unrealistic demands upon the attentions and affections of others, yet they are unable to reciprocate. Thus they are seen as exploitative. Their interpersonal relationships are fraught with disappointments. Often they alienate others and so defeat themselves. Such individuals are grievance accumulators. They go through life perceiving themselves as the unjust victims of jealous or incompetent but powerful rivals. Often a defector in which this trait is prominent was the special child of the family, the mother's obvious favorite. The family banner was handed down to him at an early age. Special things were expected. The obvious narcissist is totally unaware of his arrogance. These individuals almost never have any sense of humor about themselves. They are terribly defensive, sensitive to any slight. Often they verge on the paranoid. When their exaggerated ambitions for preeminence are thwarted they may become assassins or defectors as an attempted cheap shot into at least the footnotes of history where they all along believed that they belonged. Consider Lee Harvey Oswald, first a defector, then a redefector, ultimately an assassin. His mother referred to herself as "a mother in history."

Narcissistic individuals frequently possess a sense of special entitlements in terms of how other people will regard them and behave toward them, special

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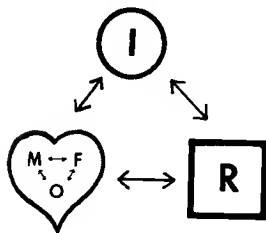
exemptions from some of the ordinary anticipated rules of human conduct. The exemptions possibly include loyalty to one's country. I make an analogy to a dark star or black hole. Their self-absorption is so enormous that everything goes in. No light, no love, no warmth, no understanding ever comes back out.

In rare cases grandiosity can take a magnanimous form as in the martyr complex. The individual imagines that he has been selected by God or History to Advance Science or Save Humanity. Often this is the attempt of a desperate defeated individual, many times betrayed by his own lights, now finally seeking to identify with an intellectualized formless ideal which cannot betray him in a human sense. At this level of sublime aspiration even in the event of failure the word defeat would not apply.

I originally described the individual psychology and the circumstances of life as independent variables. In real life, of course, they are not. In real life the individual plays a very large role in creating his circumstances. What if the individual has problems with the control of impulses or problems with sociopathic tendencies? Add problems with narcissism. How easily such problems become the mother of mischief.

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In summary, imagine a triangular diagram with the individual at the apex and the family and the regime forming the two points at the bases. Each leg of the triangle represents an emotional tie that binds each part in a reciprocal affiliation susceptible to fracture. The child that is welcomed, raised with understanding, love, and encouragement can be expected to respond to this love and



warmth with a reciprocal love and loyalty. The family members are loyal citizens of their regime and serve its interests. The regime recognizes their contributions with rewards, responsibilities, and opportunities. The state provides the child with the possibilities to fulfill his potential. This child responds by becoming a loyal citizen of his country. But that's only in the best of all possible worlds. In the real world

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there are many other possibilities. Imagine the consequences of a break in any of these links. I have mentioned the divided family. I have described the case of a young man who hated his father. What about the case of a family secretly dissident against the regime? Or a family through no perceived fault of its own repressed by the regime? What about the delayed effects of such a history? A defector may tell us how years before his family was damaged by the regime; now years later he strikes back. But this individual had his life impacted upon even while his character and his attitudes were in formation. The proverbial twig was bent. He might have simply taken all of this in, lived with it, lived around it, apparently succeeding anyway, but now a crisis occurs in his own life. On top of this background it is too much. Now he must strike back against that regime.

. . .

Life has its balances and its compensations for the adaptable, flexible, and well balanced individual who can share the success of others. The more immature individual, the more narcissistic person, will be less able to accept a share of anybody else's success. With many defectors the problems are cumulative. Perceived insults, failures and humiliations are particular burdens upon character structures with a lessened capacity to accept these setbacks.

So in the end I can't give you any one profile. Life is simply too variable and complex. Individuals' backgrounds differ enormously. Each child brings into the world a different capacity with which to react to opportunities and vicissitudes. I am sure that there are many latent defectors who never defected simply because they avoided failure. Some broke out on top and managed to remain front runners. The Agency probably has had many potential defectors who retired with honors.

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